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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 005964

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SUBJECT: SENATE STAFFER, GOM AUTHORITIES SHARE VIEWS ON
MERIDA INITIATIVE

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Charles V. Barclay. Reason:
1.4 (b), (d).

11. (SBU) Summary. Carl Meacham, the Senior Advisor on Western Hemisphere Affairs to the U.S. Senate's Foreign Relations Committee briefed a wide array of GOM officials November 7 on the current political environment in Washington and what to expect from the legislative process in the U.S. as the Congress commences its review of the Merida Initiative at hearings scheduled for November 15. GOM officials from the Office of the Presidency, the Attorney General's Office, the Center for Research on National Security (CISEN) and the military at the lunch hosted by the Foreign Secretariat's (SRE) Under Secretary for North America Carlos Rico listened attentively and raised a number of their own issues, including arms-trafficking, conditionality, and the role of the military in the counter-narcotics operations. Both sides described the Merida Initiative as an historic opportunity for the U.S. and Mexico to deepen cooperation in confronting the challenges posed by organized crime and drug trafficking. However, given the sensitivities the initiative has raised in both countries, Meacham and Rico both agreed it was not yet a "done deal." End Summary.

Arms-Trafficking

12. (SBU) The smuggling of weapons into Mexico from the U.S. represents a major concern for Mexican authorities. According to General Morfin (representing the Defense Secretariat (SEDENA)), over 80 percent of the illegal arms,

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including automatic weapons, smuggled into Mexico come from the U.S. Sigrid Arzt, the Technical Secretary of the Presidency's National Security Council Arzt expressed concern that over 12,000 gun shows take place annually along the U.S.-Mexican border providing ample opportunity for smugglers to purchase weapons for shipment across the border. CISEN's Juan Carlos Foncerrada maintained Mexican law enforcement officials were being outgunned and lamented that nearly 250 police and military officials had been killed already this year.

13. (C) SRE's Rico said the GOM was not asking for the U.S. to amend its constitution, but rather stressed the importance Mexico attached to U.S. authorities taking stricter measures to better enforce existing U.S. legislation on arms exports. The GOM is pleased with cooperation that takes place with ATF officials in Mexico. E-trace could serve a useful tool for identifying perpetrators but only if the U.S. maintained good

accurate information on weapons sold in the U.S. Mexico would like to see more action) in the U.S. -- to control the export of arms to Mexico, which the GOM believes is fundamental to winning the war against organized crime and drug trafficking.

Conditionality

¶4. (SBU) Meacham made it clear to GOM officials that the Merida Initiative was not a "done deal" in the U.S. U.S. Congressmen would look closely at Mexico's record on human rights in particular in considering whether to approve the proposed package for assistance. It was not unlikely some Congressmen might want to place some conditions on the assistance package including, potentially, periodic reports on Mexico's performance in fighting drugs and addressing human rights concerns.

¶5. (C) SRE's Rico also remarked that the Merida Initiative was not a "done deal" from the Mexican point of view. The issue of conditionality, was a delicate issue that would be closely evaluated and considered by the Mexican authorities, politicians, and the general public. The GOM was already coming under attack for what some Mexican critics were calling U.S. intervention or imposition. If too many strings were attached, Mexico could decide to reject the U.S. assistance package.

Military's "Policing" Role

¶6. (SBU) General Morfin explained that the Mexican constitution prohibits the military from carrying out police work. However, the circumstances in Mexico revealed an

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"absence of authority" in certain territories governed increasingly by the "laws of narco-trafficking," making it a national security issue allowing for the army's involvement. Morfin noted that the military is working in close coordination with PGR and SSP in the conduct of counter-narcotics operations. While Morfin hoped that the military could return to the barracks and assume its more traditional responsibilities, he did not anticipate that happening in the near future given the scope and scale of the challenges it faces.

U.S.-Mexico Cooperation

¶7. (SBU) While GOM officials welcomed the kind of concrete assistance the Merida Initiative would make possible, they attached greater importance to the overarching symbolic statement such an agreement would make about our burgeoning bilateral cooperation and commitment in combating a common enemy. GOM officials underscored that the fight against organized crime/drug trafficking was a priority for Calderon, and would remain so with or without the assistance package from the U.S. SEMAR said that it would continue to do what it was doing, but that the equipment and training from in the Merida Initiative "would help us do it better."

¶8. (C) Privately, NSC advisor Arzt remarked that a U.S. decision not to go through with the initiative would exact a very high political toll from President Calderon who had invested so much personally into this agreement. She also worried that such a decision could undercut U.S.-Mexican relations providing ammunition to U.S. critics who will want to argue it only proves Mexico can't trust the U.S.

¶9. (C) COMMENT. The GOM's readiness to gather representatives from a multitude of agencies, including the military, to exchange views on the Merida Initiative and our respective government's efforts to combat narcotics trafficking reflected its commitment to forging an agreement

and its appreciation for the role the U.S. Congress assumes in the process. Both sides agreed, however important the initiative was to our collective efforts, it was not yet a "done deal." Given the stringent monitoring requirements that already exist under U.S. statutes, the imposition of additional tough conditions will generate opposition to an agreement in Mexico. Mexican authorities will also be looking for the U.S. to do more to combat arms trafficking. Both sides hoped an agreement would only prove a starting point for a deeper relationship founded on tackling shared problems through broader cooperation.

¶10. (U) Senate advisor Meacham did not have a chance to clear on this message prior to his departure.

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